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MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 21, 1962

TO: The Vice President

FROM: Colonel Burris

SUBJECT: Cuba

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By 123, NARA, Date 12-11-91

Discussions on the Cuban situation have been carried on around the clock by State, Defense, CIA, USIA and the White House. The President has been limited to a choice of essentially three courses of action in the following order of magnitude: (1) imposition of a blockade, (2) air strike against all missile installations and air bases, (3) utilization of the full spectrum of armed forces to completely eliminate the Castro regime. The President has made the decision to pursue the first course of action -- and under certain limitations.

The blockade is to be called a quarantine and will be designed to restrict the importation of offensive weapons into Cuba. At a later date the blockade may be extended to include petroleum supplies and certain other items. It suffices to say that the selected course of action is the mildest which might be taken even when consideration is given to related political actions, such as presenting the case to the U.N., seeking action by the OAS, NATO, etc.

Even this decision was apparently arrived at in a painful fashion. On the other hand, the military leaders called for more positive action, but apparently received little support from anyone other than the Attorney General. However, Mr. Stevenson at one point even supported the idea of military action against the bases. Nevertheless, the most modest course was chosen and the President will explain the basis for his action in a nationwide television address tomorrow evening. In the meantime, emissaries have departed for London, Paris and Bonn to give those heads of Government a report on the military situation in Cuba, and to inform them in advance of the President's decision. This action seems to be the response, and perhaps a logical one, to the plea of State that further attempts be made through a Kennedy-Khrushchev meeting, through the U.N. and all other similar meetings, to further discuss the impasse.

The present course of action, therefore, constitutes the continuation of the basic problem of Cuba, as well as the manifestation of a new degree of tolerance of Soviet activities in this hemisphere. While the precise details of the blockade are now being worked out, it is clear that this course of action will result in

very limited objectives. It is in no way related to the elimination of the existing threat which hopefully will be resolved through political action. In the meantime considerable alarm has been created in the minds of those concerned with the damage which might be inflicted upon SAC bases and cities.

There is general agreement as to possible Soviet reactions to each of the U. S. courses of action. Briefly, if the U. S. takes no action at all, the build-up in Cuba will continue and the Soviet experiment will have been achieved with impunity. Having succeeded here, the Communists can be expected to take equally bold actions elsewhere in the world. Since the blockade is imposed in a limited and somewhat timid fashion, the Soviet Union is expected to retaliate perhaps with a limited blockade in Berlin. If the blockade is combined with attacks on air bases and missile sites, it is expected that there might be a delay in Soviet reaction because of the anticipation of occupation of the island by ground forces or the overt support of Cuban liberation forces. After a period of time, however, it is expected that this partial action would invoke renewed and rather severe Soviet activity in Cuba and elsewhere in Latin America, with emphasis being placed upon political and economic subversion because of manifest U. S. opposition to the military build-up. Finally, if total elimination of the Castro regime is accomplished, the Soviets will be expected to conclude that their arrogant experiment in the western hemisphere was a miscalculation. In any case, there is no element of opinion which holds that the Soviet Union will resort to nuclear war over Cuba. There are varying degrees of opinion as to whether or not the Soviets will knock out U. S. bases in Turkey and Jupiter missile installations in Italy in retaliation for the partial U. S. action against Cuban air bases and missile sites. Consideration has also been given to the possible loss of lives of the Soviet technicians in Cuba. In both these cases Soviet reactions range from improbable to acceptable.

In view of the strong recommendations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I am not certain of the various elements, conditions or individuals which suggested to the President that he further tolerate the situation in Cuba unless he has come to the fundamental decision that there has been no infringement upon hemisphere policy and that this nation is willing to accept this form of Communist effrontery. To be sure, the risks involved in eliminating the situation are grave. Yet as time goes on, not only the risks but the magnitude and number of them are certain to increase. No amount of discussion in any form, General Assembly or summit meeting, is going to moderate these unpleasant realities. In a recent press conference about the Cuban situation, the President said generally that the Cubans possessed no offensive capability and indicated that the U. S. would continue its actions (passive). It could have been logically interpreted that an offensive Cuban capability would invoke reaction from the U. S. When the

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latest information inevitably reaches the American public in the next few days, coming as it does in further progression of the Cuban fiasco, domestic political reaction will be violent. Latin American leaders will become more apprehensive and less responsive to this country. European allies will be more suspect of U.S. will and intentions. The Soviets will become more arrogant and adventurous. The President may succeed in avoiding some of these situations through his television address and related actions, but the basic problem is in no way resolved and -- as one Pentagon official put it -- we are simply tapping a hornets' nest with a short stick.

There is one additional development which should be brought to your attention, but I am not sure how this fits in with the course of action which has been chosen. The Defense Department has been pouring military supplies into Florida around the clock for the past week. These supplies, troop transport and air support for the total operation are being organized. I have been unable to determine whether highest level consideration is being given to implementation of the total plan, but certainly when knowledge of Cuban offensive capability become known, as well as the extent of the U.S. build-up in Florida, and no action is then taken, the image of timidity and irresoluteness of the worst order is inevitable.

The Cuban problem will not disappear and it will not be negotiated away except perhaps for a deal in Europe which is unacceptable. While the image of the United States will suffer in the eyes of many when overt action is taken, it must be admitted and recognized that serious damage is being done every day Castro exists, to say nothing of the actual military threat. I suggest that you attempt to persuade the President to adopt the firmer course of action and do so before there is further deterioration.